(c) to (e) India's decision was based on its own assessment of the then prevailing situation. The Government of India reiterates its continuing and consistent commitment to the SAARC process, and to increasing trade and economic cooperation among Member States towards enhancing prosperity of the SAARC region and promoting greater regional economic integration. Strengthening democracy and bringing about regional peace are not within the ambit of the SAARC agenda.

Highway Upgradation Programme

*55. DR. T. SUBBARAMI REDDY:
SHRIMATI AMBIKA SONI:

Will the Minister of SHIPPING, ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Committee on infrastructure cleared a mega expansion of the on-going highway upgradation programme, entailing an expected investment of about Rs. 1,70,000 crore over the next seven years;

(b) whether besides two phases of on—going National Highway Development Project, Government are planning to implement a third phase covering 10,000 Kms. of road connecting the State capitals; and

(c) whether connectivity of ports and heritage sites is also envisaged?

THE MINISTER OF SHIPPING, ROAD TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS (SHRI T.R. BAALU): (a) The Planning Commission made a presentation on the highway upgradation programme before the Committee on Infrastructure, set up by the Government.

(b) and (c) Yes, Sir.

Problems of Indian Fishermen detained in Pakistan

*56. SHRI LEKHRAJ BACHANI:
DR. A.K. PATEL:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Government are aware of the fact that Indian fishermen and boats are being taken into custody by the Pakistan Security Agency;

(b) if so, the steps proposed to be taken to resolve this matter; and

(c) whether the Government are considering signing an agreement with the Pakistani Authorities on the lines of the agreement between India and Srilanka?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) to (c) According to available information, the number of Indian fishermen apprehended by Pakistan from March 2004 to January 2005 is 659, while the number of boats in Pakistan's custody is 163.

Pakistan Government released 266 Indian fishermen on January 6, 2005 who were arrested between October 2003 and February 2004.

The Government is constantly in touch with the Government of Pakistan for early release and repatriation of the Indian fishermen and their boats. Pakistan government has granted consular access to 6 Indian fishermen on 17 January and approximately 650 on February 7-12, 2005.

The Governments of India and Pakistan have exchanged proposals for cooperation between Indian Coast Guards and Pakistan Maritime Security Security Agency, *inter alia*, to deal with the issue of apprehended fishermen.

During the Foreign Secretary level talks held in New Delhi on June 27-28, 2004 it was agreed to release all the apprehended fishermen in each other's custody and to put in place a mechanism for the retun of unintentionally transgressing fishermen and their boats from the high seas without apprehending them.

During the meeting between the Foreign Ministers of the two countries in New Delhi on September 5-6, 2004, it was agreed to have a meeting of Indian Coast Guards and Pakistan Maritime Security Agency to, *inter alia*, discuss the Memorandum of Understanding for establishing communication link between them and to set up a mechanism to deal with the issue of apprehended fishermen effectively and speedily.

Again, during the Foreign Secretary level talks held on December 27-28, 2004 at Islamabad it was agreed that consular access would be given to all the civilian prisoners (including fishermen) held in each other's country within three months from the date of their arrest and repatriation would be done immediately after completion of sentence and nationality verification.

During the visit of External Affairs Minister to Pakistan from February 15-17, 2005, the issue of early release and repatriation of all the Indian fishermen along with their boats was again taken up. Pakistan Foreign Minister also mentioned at the press conference held on 16.02.05, that the issue of detained fishermen and civilian prisoners was a humanitarian issue and that it was agreed to work out a mechanism for their early release following a summary procedure.

Amendment in IT Act

*57. SHRIMATI JAYA BACHCHAN: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are considering a proposal to amend the Information Technology Act; and

(b) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI DAYANIDHI MARAN): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The Government of India has set up an Expert Committee to examine and recommend suitable amendments to the Information Technology Act, 2000 as per the terms of reference given in the enclosed Statement.

Statement

Terms of reference of the expert committee on Information Technology Act

1. To re-examine the IT Act, 2000 so as to ensure that the Act remains enabler to development of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and has adequate measures for promoting growth of electronic commerce and electronic governance in the country and also for regulating cyber crimes and cyber forensics as well as addresses all aspects of the cyber security etc. in a manner that there is no scope for different interpretations and follows the international guidelines for uniformity to gain from the process of globalisation.